

The politics of the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party): a balance sheet

Ute Reissner, Justus Leicht
12 March 1999

The editorial board of the *World Socialist Web Site* calls for the immediate release of Abdullah Ocalan. The refusal of the European governments to grant him asylum and his subsequent abduction to the Turkish capital, Ankara, represents a dangerous assault on basic democratic rights. The upcoming trial of Ocalan at the hands of the Turkish government is not a fair legal process, but the pinnacle of their bloody civil war against the Kurds. The Kurdish Workers Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan--PKK) is not a terrorist grouping, but a political organisation of an oppressed national minority.

Our solidarity and sympathy for the tormented Kurdish people does not absolve us, however, from drawing up a critical balance sheet of the PKK. The circumstances of Ocalan's arrest--he had to hide himself away inside the Greek embassy in Nairobi in complete isolation--paint a graphic picture of the political dead end in which he found himself.

Since its foundation 20 years ago, the PKK aimed to overcome the oppression of the Kurdish minority in Turkey through the establishment of an independent nation-state. This was to be achieved by means of a guerrilla struggle supposedly based "on the masses themselves"; even if the PKK operated with the tacit support or toleration of certain neighbouring states. When this path showed no signs of success, and then when changes in the international situation made it appear quite hopeless, the organisation increasingly came to rely on diplomatic manoeuvres. Following each retreat from their original claims, the PKK sought the support of the imperialist powers--with careful advances first towards Clinton and then especially towards Europe. In the end it was these same European governments that allowed the PKK general secretary to walk straight into the trap.

Looking back on the well-documented barbaric oppression and persecution of the Kurdish minority by the Turkish military, the demand for an independent state could appear quite plausible. However, the PKK raised it in a situation where another resolution of the Kurdish question was within reach: a common movement of the Kurdish and Turkish working class.

Following Turkey's rapid industrial development during the 1950s and 60s, there were numerous official and spontaneous strikes and factory occupations between 1968 and 1971. Violent confrontations with the police were on the agenda. In 1967, the trade union association DISK split from the yellow Türk-IS unions. Numerous groups and organisations arose which in one way or another regarded themselves as socialist. Newspapers and magazines calling themselves Marxist had six-figure print runs.

The PKK came out of the student protest movement of that period. The first preparatory meetings for its formation took place in the early 1970s. The greater part of its founding members came from "Dev Genc" (Revolutionary Youth), which had arisen through a rebellion against the leadership of the newly founded social democratic TIP (Workers Party) in the mid 1960s.

However, this rebellion remained at the level of superficial admiration

of more radical methods than the "parliamentary road" advocated by the TIP. They found no Marxist path to the working class of Turkey.

Dev Genc glorified Mao, Che Guevara, Fidel Castro and the guerrilla war in Vietnam. Following the classic "two-stage" theory shared by Stalin and Mao, they subordinated the social struggles of the working class to a national front. They regarded Turkey as a country oppressed by imperialism, whose independence still had to be achieved. The main front ran not between the classes inside Turkey, but between the genuine patriotic forces and imperialism. The working class was ascribed a secondary role. In a statement written in 1967, Dev Genc say, "It is ... obvious that in colonial countries only the peasantry is revolutionary. They have nothing to lose and everything to win. The peasant, the declassed, the starving are the exploited who soon discover that it is only violence which pays."

In the following years, several smaller guerrilla groups came out of Dev Genc. But these were swiftly wiped out or dissolved themselves.

The Kurdish question was amongst the themes which politically active students discussed heatedly. The Kurdish minority was discriminated against in many respects; their language and way of life were not recognised. Abdullah Ocalan and the founding circle of the PKK transferred the nationalist views of the Maoist groups regarding the relationship between Turkey and the United States over to the relationship between Turkey and Kurdistan.

From this inevitably arose mutual recriminations of Turkish and Kurdish chauvinism. A pertinent formulation was penned by Christiane More, when she described the attitude of the PKK towards other organisations: "It is clear that in its relations to other movements the PKK rests less on the criterion of the class struggle, than on that of the principle of self determination." [1]

Kurdistan, according to Ocalan and his followers, a country that has been colonised by Turkey, must first establish its national independence. The social struggles of the working class and the peasantry must initially cede precedence to the national struggle. When the organisation, which was founded in 1978, nevertheless took the name "Kurdish Workers Party" (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan--PKK) this was in part an adaptation to the militant workers movement of the 1960s and 70s. It also represented the influence of Stalinism, the source of the "two-stage" theory.

The founding programme of the PKK, already drawn up in 1977, is unambiguous on this point: "As the national contradiction is the main contradiction, it is the determining factor in the resolution of all other social contradictions. As long as the national contradiction remains unresolved, it is impossible for any other social contradiction to be resolved on its own. The first steps towards a revolution in the countryside must necessarily take a national character." [2]

The programme did envisage that a future "Workers and Peasants Government", which would follow the creation of an independent state, would implement a series of measures to improve the social situation of the oppressed classes: land reform, the sharing out of the land amongst the

poor peasants; the eight-hour day; a programme for economic and industrial construction, and so on. However, these social demands must take second place to the "national-democratic revolution" pursued by means of the armed struggle: "The methods of struggle must necessarily be broadly based on violence."

This strategy was directly aimed against the transformation of Kurdish peasants into workers, against their migration to the cities and abroad, especially to Western Europe where they would become integrated into the resident working class. This process was already under way during the 1960s and 70s.

In the mountainous Kurdish regions, strongly feudal structures continued to exist that were not overcome through land reform. Society was marked by a tribal structure, big land ownership predominated. But the mechanisation of agriculture, which began in the 1950s, and the increasing industrialisation of western Turkey, paved the way for a thoroughgoing proletarianisation of the population. One authoritative study says:

"They [the Kurds] are leaving their villages due to the scarcity of land and a lack of work. In Kurdistan there was no industry which would have been able to employ them, therefore they went to the industrial centres (and many more want to follow them), and contributed to their development. Ironically, a portion of Kurdish capital is taking the same route. Rich people are investing their money in land (if they can obtain land, but this is rare), in agricultural machinery, in trade or industry in the centres. This means: *there is a Kurdish proletariat and also Kurdish industrial capital, but both are found outside Kurdistan.*" [3]

Another sociological study states:

"The share of agriculture in gross domestic product sank [from 1962 to 1978] from 40 percent to 22.2 percent, even though the number of those employed on the land has only dropped slightly (from 9.7 to 9.0 million). A result of this development was sinking incomes for those working in agriculture and a subsequent migration from the countryside. Around the cities, *gecekondu*s (shanty towns) sprang up." [4]

None of this amounts to the formation of a Kurdish bourgeoisie as the backbone of an independent nation-state, but rather signals the integration of the Kurdish people into the Turkish and international working class. The amalgamation of Turkish and Kurdish workers by means of a common socialist programme lay within reach. The perspective of a workers government would undoubtedly have opened up favourable prospects for the structural development of the backward mountain regions in the struggle against the oppression of the Kurdish minority.

On the other hand, the project of forming an independent nation-state was a backwards-looking reaction to this historic development. In the beginning it won little support, as there was no realistic social basis for it—apart from a few unemployed Kurdish academics who might have hoped to find careers and posts in such a state apparatus.

The PKK turned its back on the urban working class. Following its foundation in 1979-80, it organised a few battles and skirmishes with the big landowners, which were followed by the peasants with a certain sympathy from time to time. Support for the PKK remained limited as they renounced a radical programme to liberate the peasants, so as not to scare off the "patriotic elements" among the big landowners. Their bloody conflicts with individual *Agas* (tribal chiefs), rival Kurdish organisations and the fascist MHP, more often lead to fear and terror among ordinary people.

Meanwhile, the social democratic government of Bülent Ecevit was deliberately raking up national chauvinism and religious differences in order to gain control of the militant workers movement. The 1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus occurred during Ecevit's period in office. He entered a coalition with the Islamic Salvation Party (forerunner of the present Welfare Party) and introduced the state recognition of Islamic schools. Once he had engineered clashes in this way, in 1978 Ecevit implemented

military rule in the Kurdish provinces. At this time, there were around a million workers and students who were members of organisations claiming to be socialist.

When it still proved impossible to bring the social unrest under control, the Turkish army mounted a coup on September 12, 1980. This took place with the support of the CIA; the unstable situation in one of the front-line states of the Cold War filled the American government with apprehension.

Massive state repression of all left-wing groups followed. The socialist parties and trade unions were banned. The PKK was badly hit. In 1983 some 1,800 PKK members were charged with "separatist activities". Most of them avoided annihilation by fleeing to Syria and Lebanon, some went to Iran or Iraq. Two years later, the PKK fought alongside the PLO in Lebanon. Öcalan had already gone into exile in the Syrian capital, Damascus, in 1979.

In the Syrian-controlled Bekaa and Bar Elias valleys, the PKK established guerrilla training camps. In the summer of 1984 they announced the start of a new armed struggle with the spectacular occupation of two Turkish military posts. They formed the "Liberation Army of Kurdistan" (HRK), then a year later in spring 1985, the "National Liberation Front of Kurdistan" (ERNK).

The second half of the 1980s was characterised by the brutal war conducted by the Turkish state against the guerrillas. The government pursued a policy of "scorched earth", razing entire Kurdish villages to the ground in the border region with Iraq, driving out their inhabitants. According to Kurdish sources, between 1984 and 1990 some 2,500 villages were subject to such enforced resettlement.

In 1985 the Turkish government implemented the system of so-called "village guards". This involved either individuals or whole Kurdish tribes being bribed and provided with arms to fight against the PKK. The terror meted out by the Turkish army and their counter-insurgents is described in many eyewitness accounts and is not questioned by any objective observer.

"We posed the people with a choice", as former lieutenant Yener Solyu described his actions to the journalist Gottfried Stein, "either they acted as village guards, or they would be resettled in other provinces. In the evening, we staged what appeared to be a skirmish with the guerrillas, we shot at windows and also directed heavy weapons against the village. As the people depended on their harvest and animals, we destroyed their fields and slaughtered the animals. If this did not help, we surrounded the village and sent in the counter-guerrillas. They would interrogate the people and then kill a few of them. Sometimes we torched their houses with flame-throwers or rocket-launchers just for fun, or we would simply leave unexploded grenades lying around." [5]

Solyu also describes the terrible methods of torture employed by the military, and comments, "In order to be tortured you didn't have to be suspected of being a PKK fighter; it was enough just to be a Kurd." [6] Even 12-year-old Kurdish children perished under torture.

The PKK hit back accordingly. The civilian population that had not fled or been driven out of the region were often caught between the fronts. The military would threaten all those who refused to stand against the PKK with torture and death. The guerrillas would shoot the houses of the village guards with Syrian rockets, and conducted a merciless hunt against those suspected of being "collaborators". They destroyed Turkish schools, which they dubbed "centres of moral and ideological subversion". This also meant the murder of numerous teachers.

At its third party congress in October 1986 the PKK complained about weak support from the population. In the following years the pure desperation resulting from the terror meted out by the Turkish state drove new forces towards them. But there could still be no talk of real mass support or deep roots in the Kurdish people. The PKK continued to complain about this in its publications and admitted it openly at its fourth congress in 1990. In his speech to this congress, Abdullah Öcalan

characterised the "mass murder and attacks on the population" carried out by "local leaders" as a serious error: "It can only help the enemy if the population are not treated correctly and with care." [7]

The situation was made harder for the PKK by the fact that their temporary allies in the northern Iraqi PDK (Democratic Party of Kurdistan) under Massud Barzani had begun to stab them in the back. At the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988, Saddam Hussein attacked the Kurds in northern Iraq with poison gas. A flood of refugees into neighbouring Turkey ensued, where Barzani established relations with the Turkish government and formed an alliance with other Kurdish organisations opposed to the PKK. In the following years, Barzani's troops continually participated alongside the Turkish army in attacks on PKK bases in northern Iraq.

The increasing hopelessness of the armed struggle meant that by 1988 the PKK had already proposed its first cease-fire, which was turned down by the Turkish government.

A decisive turning point came with the collapse of the Soviet Union, which started in 1989, and the gulf war in early 1991.

In 1989, there was a revival of militant workers struggles in Turkey, which culminated in a general strike in January 1991. The Stalinist countries of Eastern Europe were seething with mass protests. In 1990, following massacres by the Turkish army, thousands of youth took to the streets in Kurdish cities, inspired by the Palestinian *intifada*. America's role in the gulf war provoked outrage.

Quite unexpectedly, this social movement brought the PKK new forces and strong support. However, the demise of the Soviet Union and the gulf war completely undermined the previous strategy of the PKK. Despite the almost ritual incantation that "the people are the main pillar of every revolutionary movement", the PKK was only able to function due to the protection, or at least the toleration, of the Syrian government of President Hafez Al-Assad. Ocalan and the Central Committee of the PKK were located in Damascus, and their most important bases and training camps were in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa valley.

The end of the Soviet Union meant that such Arab regimes, which had previously enjoyed a certain room to manoeuvre against imperialism, lost their main economic and political support. This applied to Syria, which lost important markets and trade relations in the Soviet republics, and began to orient towards the European powers.

Moreover, Syria supported the US in its war against Iraq in January 1991. This military action by the Bush government signalled America's unambiguous claim, as the world's leading imperialist power, to establish a new order in the Middle East according to its own interests. Turkey played a central role as a base for NATO operations and a close American ally. Suddenly the PKK found itself at the intersection of a political struggle of world proportions.

Ocalan recognised this, but could provide no immediate answers. A clear picture can be seen if one reads the PKK statements of the time, especially those documents from their fourth congress in December 1990, contained in *Kurdistan Report*, and the statement on the gulf war which followed. Its previous military strategy had failed, so the PKK began the search for new partners, diplomatic manoeuvres, and for more powerful allies among the region's governments or in Europe.

It was very difficult to push this new policy through inside the organisation, as it implied a break with the previous principles of the PKK.

In the past, the PKK had constantly delineated itself from all other Kurdish organisations through its unconditional call for an independent state and the rejection of any partial solution based on autonomy for the Kurds within Turkey. They castigated the attitudes of the northern Iraqi KDP under Barzani, and the Iranian Kurdish Congress PUK under Celal Talabani, who had continually collaborated with the US and had openly fought on their side in the gulf war.

"The attitude of the Kurdish resistance groups from the Iraqi-occupied part of our land," the PKK wrote on October 15, 1990, during the first stages of the Gulf War, "is the classical position of the Kurdish ruling class, who pursue the line of collaboration with the enemy's enemy as a strategic element of their policy. The current position corresponds to a currying of favour with imperialism. This sees the Kurds as only ever playing the role of a pawn on the chessboard. It is closely bound up with the reactionary call for autonomy, if not even a result of this demand." [8] To this, the PKK counterposed the need to "oppose the imperialist-colonial war with a national uprising."

And yet the logic of the policies of the PKK drove them inevitably down the same road that they had condemned in other organisations. Since they rejected a programme aimed at the common mobilisation of the working class throughout the Middle East, or at least of Turkish and Kurdish workers, there remained no other way than to "curry favour with imperialism". Moreover, it was clear that the strategy of guerrilla warfare was hopeless against the weapons technology tested by the US in the gulf war against Iraq.

The new course was carried through inside the PKK over the next years against considerable inner divisions and tensions. Numerous purges and an irrational worship of Ocalan accompanied the process, which provided an ideological veil behind which the PKK leadership could continue to operate.

When the party congress at the end of 1990 began to discuss the dissolution of the Soviet Union, hopeless confusion broke out. The origins of this event were sought outside the sphere of politics: "We saw how the dead end of socialist ideology has its roots in morality," was how Ocalan summed it up a few years later. "It appears that a reason for the dissolution of real existing socialism was the neglect of moral values and religion." [9] This evaluation was the prelude to the gradual distancing of the PKK from its "Marxist-Leninist" phraseology.

The hopes of the entire region, and even of humanity itself, were now to be pinned solely on the Kurdish liberation struggle. The fourth party congress promulgated the slogan "A free fatherland, or death!" The martial language was clearly tailored for the militant but politically inexperienced youth in the Kurdish areas: "Under the leadership of the PKK, Kurdistan is ready for the most glorious and magnificent resistance in its history. Its battles will shake heaven and hell."

At the same time, there was an extensive purge of inner-party critics, to give Ocalan a free hand for the upcoming diplomatic manoeuvres. Long passages such as the following can be read: "The conference dealt thoroughly with the feudal conspirators who recognised no rules in the struggle; with guerrillas who degenerated into rebel banditry, that destroyed revolutionary life.... Our congress has once more established the determining role of chairman APO [Ocalan] in the development of the national liberation struggle and the achievement of victory.... The struggle against every form of defeatist and destructive activity and the need to anchor the distinguished personality (Ocalan) more firmly in his environment was fully supported." [10]

Directly after the gulf war the PKK named its terms for a cease-fire and offered the Turkish government negotiations, without success.

In a statement on April 1, 1991, at the end of the gulf war, the PKK declared, "While on the one side, Iraq, formerly an important pillar of the reactionary status quo, has been weakened, imperialism was unable to install its new order in the region. This has given rise to new possibilities for the peoples of the region, and especially for the Kurdish people, and likewise for the Iraqi and Turkish peoples." [11]

The PKK now began to turn towards the European powers, to try and win their support for the establishment of an independent Kurdish state. At the same time, in January 1991, Ocalan met with Celal Talabani, the leader of the Iraqi Kurdistan Front, which had supported the United States during the gulf war. Following the meeting, Talabani travelled

immediately to Ankara to speak with the head of the Turkish government, Turgut Ozal. Then he went on to Washington where, at Camp David, he conferred with President George Bush. Naturally, the PKK distanced itself from these talks, "The people continue to be the main pillar of every revolutionary movement. No tactic and no favourable international constellation, and especially no imperialist support, can replace this role." [12] However, the PKK kept open its offer to collaborate with Talabani and immediately sought to continue this policy.

During this time, the Turkish government intensified its terror in the Kurdish areas. The massacre of civilians at the Kurdish New Year festival on March 21, 1992 is well known internationally. The army fired into the crowds celebrating and more than one hundred were killed and several hundred injured. There were many other bloody acts carried out by the Turkish security forces. The repression was worse than in the 1980s.

In 1992 and early 1993 the PKK continued to win broad support. Some 100,000 people participated in the 1992 elections which they initiated to the exile parliament in The Hague. This growth was probably connected to the fact that, apart from the outrage resulting from the army's repression, following the collapse of the Soviet Union the Turkish workers organisations made a sharp turn to the right and officially dropped any claims to socialism.

At a joint press conference with Celal Talabani in March 1993 in Syrian Bar Elias, Ocalan declared a unilateral cease-fire and announced publicly for the first time that the PKK was relinquishing the demand for an independent state. He said that the PKK was ready to resolve the Kurdish question politically and begin peaceful negotiations. This call was supported by various European governments, and generally amongst the European social democrats and Greens. The Turkish government replied with provocations and the cease-fire held only until the beginning of July.

Two years before the cease-fire offer, the PKK's National Liberation Front of Kurdistan had threatened: "All those who engage in negotiations with the enemy regarding any form of cultural autonomy as opposed to national independence will pay for this dearly. They will be unable to save themselves from the anger of our national liberation, which no force can hold back, and will be destroyed by it." [13] Now "Apo" himself had given up the call for an independent state, but the Turkish government pursued the war with even greater ferocity.

The government was acting, above all, against the increasing class polarisation in Turkey. The PKK would pay tribute to the struggles of Turkish workers and publish several joint statements with Turkish Maoist groups, whenever they turned very militant. But their main efforts were concentrated on seeking a rapprochement with various imperialist powers.

In 1995 violent uprisings broke out in the poorest districts of Istanbul, where tens of thousands of Kurdish refugees lived. But at its fifth congress the PKK oriented towards "the proposals for dialogue from states and institutions", and sought to incorporate Islamists into the work of an "even broader popular front" inside ERNK.

The strategy of giving precedence to the supposed solution of the "national question" above any socialist perspective now clearly separated the PKK from the mass of impoverished Kurds. The DEP party (later HADEP), which was sympathetic to the PKK, active in the towns and cities, did not have a programme to meet the needs of the slum dwellers who faced indescribable poverty. They relied for support on better off layers in the academic middle class.

At this time, a section of the Turkish bourgeoisie signalled its willingness to seek an accommodation with the PKK. Cem Boyner, the chairman of one of the employers' organisations, called openly in 1995 for a negotiated solution regarding autonomy for the Kurdish areas. President Ozal also indicated a readiness to talk. However, this wing was unable to prevail. Confronted with sharpening social conflict, the Turkish ruling class would rather rely on the sure card of police and military violence.

The PKK's search for allies now took on increasingly desperate and

humiliating forms. Ocalan appealed especially to the German government to use him and the PKK as a tool against the powerful influence of the US in the region. In an interview with the newspaper *Die Welt* on May 20, 1996, Ocalan declared, "Many German virtues certainly still apply today; and German products are still admirable: technology, cars, pharmaceuticals, etc. And especially their political model of federalism. However, there are many things that I find unworthy of Germany today. For example, clearly very many Germans have deliberately relinquished their characteristic spiritual heritage, they deny their uniqueness and would rather behave like a lot of little Americans. Also, the question of foreign policy. One often gets the impression that there is no longer any independent German foreign policy. Here, a reunited Germany must grasp its own significance and pursue its own interests. It would appear, however, that Germany is satisfied to be a mere appendage."

Ocalan used the visit of a notorious right-wing parliamentarian, Christian Democrat Heinrich Lummer, to directly appeal to Germany's national interests: "There is a considerable Kurdish population within the three biggest states of the Middle East: Iraq, Iran and Turkey. Even if it does not appear to be the case at this point in time, sooner or later without Kurdish collaboration nothing will move in these states. At least, there can be no peace in this region, which is also important for Germany, as long as our human rights are refused.... It can only be good for Germany if the situation in Kurdistan finally changes so that the Kurds in Germany can return to their homes."

In their publications in 1997, the PKK dealt extensively with the relationship of powers in the Middle East. They indicated their considerations as to how the conflicts of interests between the US, Turkey and Israel, on the one side, and Russia, Iran, Iraq and Syria, on the other, could be utilised. This concerns the exploitation of oil reserves in the Caspian Sea and the disputed route of a pipeline to transport them to the West. An article in *Kurdistan Report* (no. 97, 1997) celebrates the warming of relations between Syria and Iraq as a serious blow against Turkey's strategy.

The PKK's crisis escalated. Since Turkey did not let up in its attacks, the ranks of its fighters were decimated. They report that in 1997 there were well over 2,000 clashes with the Turkish military and the KDP fighters in northern Iraq. These saw--according to them--the killing of 2,759 Turkish soldiers and 2,713 collaborators (including 597 village guards). Nearly 1,000 guerrillas fell in combat. It is the record of a merciless war of attrition.

A Middle East conference of the PKK in March 1998 noted that the organisation's links to the popular masses had suffered in the preceding period. In *Kurdistan Report* (no. 91, 1998) the following can be read: "The conference expressly stressed that the link between the people and its leadership is the foundation of our struggle, which has almost been forgotten.... Pragmatic, backward and ostracising behaviour were subjected to sharp criticism." The "Free Women's Association" and the women's army had not developed favourably. "It was established that the sensitivity required to come closer to the people was not demonstrated. Instead, daily practices were displayed which amounted to the exploitation and taking advantage of the people.... [It is] urgently necessary that the masses not be left alone, but to organise and lead them."

There was a renewed and extensive purge at this congress. "Activities that are aimed at collaboration, liquidation of the party line, and the formation of groups inside the movement have been investigated and condemned during the last two years."

In the "decisions regarding diplomatic work and alliances", the congress was reminded of the need for closer relations with other national movements. The PKK's diplomatic activities were said to be wanting, and relations with other peoples limited.

More than 10 years after Gorbachev's perestroika, the word "socialism" no longer appeared inside the PKK. The warlike incantations about the

armed struggle were also disappearing. Instead, the talk was now that "our party places people and their well being at the centre. This is achieved through the realisation of human freedom, as well as the purity and naturalness of the environment, and the unadulterated character of art, culture and history for the good of humanity." [14] And while Ocalan engaged in writing long treatments regarding the role of women, he warned against the excessive use of the term "working class", since it was precisely this section of the population that was insufficiently "patriotic".

This congress, held in the spring of last year, can only be interpreted as a declaration of the failure of the strategy of national liberation by means of the armed struggle. Even Ocalan's offers to become the new Arafat or Mandela have been turned down. The PKK has not found any powerful allies; no government supports them or is prepared to utilise the Kurdish question in their own interests.

Faced with the enormous intensification of social contradictions in every country as a consequence of globalisation, no ruling class considered itself capable of granting even the most limited democratic concessions. So Ocalan was more and more caught in the inescapable diplomatic net of betrayal and intrigue that finally culminated in his abduction to Ankara.

The United States, whose secret service organised Ocalan's kidnapping, is seeking to cement its supremacy over the Middle and Far East. For America, the Kurdish national movement was simply an obstacle to be removed in this pursuit. The European governments refused to grant Ocalan asylum as they did not want such a socially explosive issue on their doorstep. The Arab governments, which once claimed to represent a certain counter-weight to the influence of the US in the region, did not lift a finger to defend the Kurds, who they oppress at home. President Assad expelled Ocalan from Syria under Turkish pressure. And the allegedly democratic Russia would not accept him. Over the course of the last years, the PKK has appealed to all these governments and even placed its hopes in them.

Although Ocalan never acknowledged the primacy of the class question over the national question, in the end, he fell victim to the former. The only perspective offering an end to national and social oppression throughout the Middle East is the unification of the working class of the entire region as part of a socialist world movement.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact